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Aquatic Invasive Species Program--FY09 Status Report

2009 Legislative Briefing of Progress Regarding the 2008 Boating Season

Background & Legislation: The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources' (UDWR) Aquatic Invasive Species Program was launched on July 1, 2007. Program initiation followed briefings of the Department of Natural Resources, the Governor's Office and the Legislature's Natural Resources Interim Appropriation Committee about threat to Utah from *Dreissenid* mussel species (quagga and zebra mussels). FY08 operations were based upon a supplemental budget (\$1,106,500) from General Funds provided by the 2008 Legislature. Additionally, ongoing General Funds (\$1,400,000) were provided for FY09 operations to continue the program into the future. The 2008 Legislature also passed the Utah Aquatic Invasive Species Interdiction Act. A second briefing of the interim committee about program progress occurred in August 2008, and UDWR's FY10 budget request will again seek \$1,400,000.

Authority: The Act and resultant Rule R657-60, Aquatic Invasive Species Interdiction, passed by the Utah Wildlife Board in June 2008, provides UDWR with the needed authority to prohibit possession and transportation of *Dreissenid* mussels. Additionally, vehicles or watercraft are prohibited from leaving infested waters without first being decontaminated, which provides UDWR the authority to stop, detain, inspect, impound, or quarantine a vehicle or vessel that may contain a *Dreissenid* mussel. This includes the authority to demand decontamination, if needed. The new authority also allows UDWR in consultation with a water body operator to close infested water bodies to the ingress/egress of vehicles and watercraft until a suitable *Dreissenid* mussel response plan is implemented.

AIS Plan Implementation: A multi-agency Utah Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force comprised of state, federal, local government & industrial water users was impaneled to write and implement Utah's Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan. The plan has been approved by the Utah Wildlife Board and the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget Resource Development Coordination Committee. The plan is on its final leg of approval by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force. An aggressive statewide outreach effort involving news media, brochures, billboards, plus thousands of boat launch signs and recreation area posters has resulted from UDWR's implementation of the plan. Implementation included the assigning and equipping of 47 personnel (25.21 FTE as a coordinator, outreach specialist, 5 biologists, 35 boat inspection technicians and 5 conservation officers) to conduct aquatic invasive species work, primarily focused upon education and interdiction of pre-launch or departing water craft operators as it relates to control of *Dreissenid* mussels. Additionally, UDWR acquired 26 trailer mounted decontamination units that are assigned statewide.

Partners: Utah Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force partners are all assisting with plan implementation through ongoing, in-kind match. It is noteworthy that the National Park Service at Lake Powell is planning to commit \$1,523,404 to the effort between FY09 and FY11, while having spent \$80,000 in FY08. The U.S. Forest Service will provide \$99,000 to the effort from their current FY09 budget.



Interdiction of Boats: During the FY09 boating season 71,317 pre-launch boats were interdicted and inspected across Utah (Northern Region 9,518; Central Region 35,200; Southern Region 5,474; Lake Powell 13,244; Northeastern Region 5,341; Southeastern Region 2,540), while boat operators were provided an educational message about *Dreissenid* mussels. This effort resulted in 818 boats being decontaminated (Northern Region 27; Central Region 132; Southern Region 61; Lake Powell 395; Northeastern Region 187; Southeastern Region 16), since most had recently boated in North America on a *Dreissenid* infested water. All boaters launching in Utah must certify pre-launch that their boats are “mussel free,” and compliance during the first boating season for this requirement varied from 45% to 100%, depending on location. On-ramp surveys showed that due to education and outreach efforts, a high percentage (89%) of boaters were aware of the *Dreissenid* mussel threat, realizing that they needed to properly clean, drain and dry their equipment. Continuing efforts must ensue in order to retain this level of participation by boaters, which will minimize movement of *Dreissenid* mussels.

Early Detection of *Dreissenid* Mussels:

To date, Emery County’s Electric Lake, situated in the headwaters of the Right Fork of the Huntington River, is the only water within Utah known to be infested with *Dreissena* mussels. An aggressive sampling of plankton from 38 Utah water bodies by UDWR biologists and resultant microscopic and DNA analysis by Bureau of Reclamation and Pisces Molecular labs in Colorado made this determination. Such information will aid UDWR and partner resource managers across the nation with risk assessment for other waters, which may aid in deterring infestations by *Dreissena* mussels.

